

THE PROFILE AND VALUE SYSTEMS OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

Rusinah Joned and Maimunah Ismail

Department of Extension Education, Faculty of Educational Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM, Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

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Introduction

Research on entrepreneurship having gender perspectives was developed in the 1980s all over the world, including Malaysia. One of the research areas has been on entrepreneurs' values the significance of which values influence any entrepreneurial decisions and behaviour (Barret, 1995). While much research into value system has focused on managers in large organisations, few studies have analysed what are the values of women entrepreneurs in relation to managing their enterprises. The objectives of this study are to discuss the profile and value systems of women entrepreneurs.

Materials and Methods

The population of this study was 310 Malay women entrepreneurs whose names and addresses were obtained from several women business associations in Malaysia. Data on the profile entrepreneurs were collected using mailed questionnaire in which 106 entrepreneurs responded. The respondents were asked about their personal and entrepreneurial characteristics, factors motivating them into entrepreneurship and problems they faced at the start-up and growing stages. In-depth face-to-face interviews with selected 12 successful Malay women entrepreneurs were conducted to get data on value systems. Data transcriptions were conducted, after which the constant comparative technique (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) was executed for the formation of data categories pertaining to value systems of women in entrepreneurship.

Results and Discussion

Results shows that many women entrepreneurs in the study was young (average age of 31 years), and they obtained tertiary education. Women entrepreneurs were involved in services-oriented business, retail business, wholesale, training and consultancy, and educational related business. These findings are supported by studies of Licuanan (1992) and Maimunah (1996). The average age of business was 8.5 years indicating that many women started entrepreneurship

in the late 80s at the end of recession of the decade. More than 80% of the entrepreneurs had their previous jobs in the government sector. The data also show that job satisfaction and economic reasons were the motivating factors for women to venture into entrepreneurship. This in general, reflects women's desire to have more control over their work and working environments. Major problems cited were related to finances (54%), workers (24%), managerial skills (23%), and marketing (16%). This is in accordance with a study done by Hisrich and Brush (1984). Several value systems, which are different from the universal means and end values emerged in this study, peculiar to this group of Malay women entrepreneurs. They are related to image building, religious values, gender awareness, and nationalistic spirit.

Conclusions

Women entrepreneurs' profile shows that they are young, highly educated, and involved in traditional and non-traditional businesses. Major problems they faced are typical problems of small and medium business owners that are finances, workers, managerial skills and marketing. Four newly emerged value systems of women entrepreneurs are related to image building, religious values, gender awareness and naturalistic spirit.

The study provides insights into the involvement of Malay women in entrepreneurship. It also gives the picture of their personal values as related to entrepreneurial management peculiar to this group of Malaysian women. This certainly adds to the literature on women entrepreneurship in Malaysia, which is useful to agencies responsible for developing women entrepreneurs such as training agencies as well as financial institutions.

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